

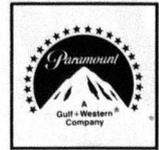
Jud Crandall (Fred Gwynne, left) meets his new neighbors, Rachel and Louis Creed. (Denise Crosby and Dale Midkiff) and their children Ellie and Gage (Blaze Berdahl, right, and Miko Hughes).



Stephen King with Director Mary Lambert

# PET SEMATARY

## THINGS THAT WON'T STAY BURIED



**W**hen Stephen King sold the film rights to **Pet Sematary** in 1984, he confessed he found the book

— easily his most successful up to that time — “detestable.” “You never know when an idea will turn mean,” the 41-year-old author told Aljean Harmetz in *The New York Times*. “My wife read it and cried and said ‘You can’t publish this.’” King took his wife’s advice and stuck **Pet Sematary** in a drawer for three years. It was only with his back to the wall in 1983 (he was obligated to supply Doubleday with a novel and had nothing else to give them) that he took the story out of the drawer.

And what is the story that Mrs. King found so chilling? After all, King’s wife apparently sat approvingly through the release of such previous horrors as *Carrie*, *The Shining*, *Christine*, *Cujo*, *Firestarter* and *The Dead Zone*, so the lady doesn’t exactly have a sensitive stomach.

Well, it’s the story of a nice Chicago family recently arrived in Ludlow, Maine. Dr. Louis Creed (Dale Midkiff, who portrayed Elvis Presley in the TV mini-series *Elvis and Me*) has taken up duties as the director of student health at the local university. Together with his wife Rachel (Denise Crosby, from the TV series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*) and their two young children, he has moved into a nice colonial house on the outskirts of town. It’s an isolated spot, the rustic silence broken only now and then by the roar of an Orinco oil rig barreling past.

And there is this cemetery behind the house. Dr. Creed is first shown the cemetery by Old Jud Crandall (Fred Gwynne, probably best-remembered as Herman Munster) an authentic down east character who lives across the highway. At first Dr. Creed thinks the cemetery is simply an eccentric idea — a place where local children have gone over the years to bury their dead dogs and parakeets.

But then a cat belonging to Dr. Creed’s five year old daughter, Ellie, is run over by one of those barreling Orinco rigs. Little Ellie buries her cat in the pet sematary (kids can’t spell, as we all know). And then the cat comes back to life

— slightly “altered” shall we say. Could it all have something to do with the Micmac Indian burial grounds just beyond the cemetery? And what might happen if a human being were buried in the pet sematary?

“This is vintage King” Mary K. Chelton wrote in reviewing the novel “with the suspense slow, savored and inexorable, with all the little familiar and ironic touches King is master of. Creed, for example, pays for his son’s funeral with a MasterCard. Possibly the best thing about the book is that the ending is inevitable and known almost instinctively early in the book, but the reader simply cannot help finding out how Creed gets there.”

The idea for the novel first came to Stephen King one night while he was crossing the road beside his house. King used to live in a small Maine town, not unlike Ludlow, where he taught at a local private school (in fact, it was while teaching English there that King began work on his first published novel *Carrie*).

“My family and I did move to a house in the country” King has explained “and behind the house there was a pet cemetery.” In 1979 his cat was run over by a truck. His son only narrowly avoided being run over. “If things had changed by five seconds” he notes “we would have lost one of our kids.”

**Pet Sematary** is the first King novel adapted for the screen by the author himself. He did not like what was done by others to previous novels en route to movie houses. “Neither Stanley Kubrick nor the screenwriter Diane Johnson had any knowledge of the genre” King said, referring to the creative team on *The Shining*. “It was like they had never seen a horror film before, so they did a lot of things audiences had seen before.”

This time out King not only wrote the screenplay but was a substantial creative and financial partner in the production. And the movie was shot not in Hollywood, which King describes as “a strange country” but in good old Maine. There, of course, nothing strange ever happens.

**Pet Sematary** opens Friday, April 21.

— Lyle Slack

